Ah YOUTH!
America lacked out in the Revolutionary War. While there were some Members of Parliament who believed that England was headed for disaster, most just did not understand what all the fuss in the colonies was about. On the other hand, on our side, we had a confluence of remarkably able individuals. And how young they were. We all know that Marquis de Lafayette played a vital role in the war. In 1777, he accepted an appointment as a Major General in the Continental Army, serving without salary. What is less known is that he was only 20 years old at the time. (He did, however, have six years of experience in the French Army.)

In 1776, George Washington was 22, Thomas Jefferson, 33; John Hancock, 39; Alexander Hamilton, 21; John Adams, 41. Benjamin Franklin was the graybeard at 70.

As to the Continental Army, General ‘Mad Anthony’ Wayne was 32; Captain John Paul Jones, 29; General Nathanael Greene, 36; General Thaddeus Kosciuszko, 30; Lieutenant Colonel John Mercer, who led troops in the Battle of Princeton, was 18; Lieutenant Colonel Aaron Burr was 21.

Young they were - at least by the standards of our day. But in colonial days being young was probably very different. Life expectancy was lower so there were fewer old guys around. But this fact can’t explain it all. Excluding the high rate of child mortality, males died at an average age of 65. Of the 56 individuals who signed the Declaration of Independence, only 12 were over 30. If such an important document were to be signed today, it is unlikely that any one of the 56 would be less than 50. It may just be that revolution is a young person’s game. Also, in those days, real life began at a younger age. And you do not have to go that far back. My father-in-law, at age 14, moved away from his family to another city to apprentice as a printer’s devil.

About a century later, in the Civil War period, the ages of the leaders had substantially increased. In 1865, Lincoln was 54 and his Vice President, Andrew Johnson, was 55. There were two generals who were quite young. Jeb Stuart at 30 and Philip Sheridan at 32. As for the others, Grant was 41; Lee 56; Hooker 49; McClellan 44; Meade 48; Early 47 and Admiral Farragut 62.

One war later, the leaders were still older. Roosevelt was 56; Truman, 58; Patton, 57; Marshall, 62; Arnold, 56; MacArthur, 62; Admiral Leahy, 67; Eisenhower was the youngest at 52.

I do not know how to interpret the above information. In the Revolution, older people were probably more likely to opt for the status quo. Is it that the world has become more complicated, that more experience is required? Or perhaps, we do not credit young people with the ability they actually have. One thing is certain - we have less confidence in our youth than was previously true. Makes me wonder: Is it that we have so little confidence in them because we treat our young men and women as boys and girls and as a result, they never have the opportunity to show their ability?
The Cornell, at which we arrived in June of 1951, was a very different Cornell than it is today. This is not unexpected since most institutions change drastically over half a century. Many of the changes resulted from a transforming society or developing technology.

One of the more significant changes had to do with the University's attempt to impose a moral code on everyone, students, faculty and staff. When parents sent their sons and daughters off to college, the institution was expected to play the role of a loco parents, a charge which was taken seriously. Female students were required to be in their dorms at ten o'clock on weekdays and twelve o'clock on Friday and Saturday. The university was never able to satisfactorily explain why the same rule did not apply to men.

In the fifties, a landlady reported to the Dean of Students that one of her roomers, a chemistry student, had a woman in his room all night. The case went to a committee and the student was expelled. (The Chemistry Department got him into another university). Such judgements were delivered by the University Practive, in those days a gentleman. Lowell George; George who could, on his own, suspend a student - and he always added at the end, "and be out of Ithaca in five days."

The university had other ways to protect the ladies. Here is an entry from the 1951 campus telephone directory. The asterisk tells the young women that the guy is married.

Here is a scene from a course taught in the College of Home Economics back in those days. This course taught the class how to deal with real live babies. Almost all of the students and faculty of this college were female; and a major objective of this institution was to produce All American Housewives. Courses were taught in such things as household plumbing and the repair of appliances. Everything a young woman should know to run a house. As can be seen in the photograph, the dress code was different in 1951.

There has been a substantial evolution of the university faculty in the fifty years. Back then, they were much more focused on the university. When I was Dean of the Graduate School, in the sixties, a meeting of the graduate faculty might have 50 attendees. Today's faculty member could not imagine how such a meeting could be the least bit useful. Those meetings generally discussed such items as academic standards to be applied across the Graduate School. I do not believe that such a topic would be of interest these days. Professors are concerned with their own group and give little thought to academic standards in the rest of the university. The Chemistry Department was more closely knit. We had a table at the Statler and many of us ate lunch together. Coffee hour would have up to ten people. I think that these changes are a natural evolution of increased ease of communications. In 1951, one had to make an appointment to telephone someone in California. Nowadays one can interact with a colleague in Oxford, or Tokyo, as easily as a person across campus. To me, it seems only natural that clustering of individuals would put more emphasis on common interests rather than proximity.

As a first approximation, the Baker Lab I walked into in 1951 had no instruments. There were small things as galvanometers and potentiometers, but I believe that there was only one commercial instrument, a Beckman DU Spectrophotometer. We soon purchased a Perkin-Elmer infra red spectrometer. (It was the fourth instrument they produced.) All other instrumentation was built in the machine shop.

Lastly, there is one other change which might be difficult to understand knowing Cornell's Campus today. As an assistant professor, I had a reserved parking space in Baker Court. I even remember that it was space 344. As a matter of fact, it was not that big a deal - parking on campus was just not a problem.